The 50th Anniversary Celebration of
Skiing at Middlebury
November 10, 1984

Fifty years ago this year two major events occurred in the early history of Middlebury Skiing. The newly formed Mountain Club held the first Winter Carnival, and later that same Summer, an enthusiastic group of local skiers cut the first ski trails on Worth Mountain. These events would signal the beginning of a tradition of excellence of skiing at Middlebury College.

However, there were some events in Middlebury skiing that took place much earlier. A group of outdoorsmen, including Roger Hall, Ray Noonan and Arthur Ferry, were competing in winter sports in 1921. Arthur Ferry recalls the McGill Winter Carnival where he competed and was disqualified in the cross country race for throwing down his ski poles in an attempt to save some time near the finish line. These individuals would form a club team and elect as their captain Cy Shelvey from the Class of 1924. Cy would become the first captain of any Middlebury College ski team.

In 1925, the College would hire Jay Fritz as Business Manager. A former U.S. Forest Service Forester, Fritz would use his experience in the forest service and his position as a college business manager to encourage the development of the first ski trails on Worth Mountain, the present site of the Snow Bowl.

The interest in Winter sports at Middlebury developed rapidly in the early 1930's. In 1931 the Middlebury Mountain Club was formed and, following the successful Winter Olympics in 1932 in Lake Placid, a Winter sports team was established. In 1933, skiing was added as an alternative to snow shoeing on Mountain Club trips. W. Wyman Smith '35 recalls:

> "In 1933 I accompanied Coach Brown, Head of Athletics, and Professor Voter who was a chemistry professor and a Trustee of Chipman Hill to Lake Placid. We brought back a blueprint of the Municipal Jump there. That year or the following we persuaded WPA to finance the building of a jump on Chipman. We also had two downhill trails on Chipman. One was named Hades express. I was chairman of the 1934 Winter Carnival which I believe to be the first carnival. Otto Schneibs was coach at Dartmouth. A man from Hanover came over and gave ski lessons on the hill in front of Mead Chapel. These were the first ski lessons at the College. The style was the Alberg technique. In 1934 and 1935 we expanded skiing and sent teams of two to three to all the Eastern carnivals. I am now in the '70 Plus Ski Club and enjoy my lifetime pass at Mansfield."

Howard Kelley '34, was captain of the 1934 Ski Team. Kelley was mostly a snow shoe racer, competing in the cross country, the dash, and the obstacle race. In that first

carnival, Howard Kelley finished second to a Dartmouth racer in the cross country snow shoe race.

Within the next year, enthusiasm for skiing in Middlebury really took hold. Construction of the new ski jump began at Chipman Hill and trail cutting on Worth Mountain began in earnest with the work done primarily by town people. An open slope was cut at the Snow Bowl and automobile mechanics from Cartmell's rigged a rope tow on an old model T Ford. The captain of the '35 Ski Team, Reg Springstead, a renowned daredevil was followed in 1936 by Captain John Holmes. Some of John's earlier memories were driving up to Stowe and climbing the nosedive trail to get in four runs in a day for ski practice. There was no specialization in the early ski teams and the four team members competed in four events - alpine, cross country, jumping and snowshoeing. Charles Harvi, team captain in 1937 remembers:

> Our transportation to races to the meets was one Packard limousine with a trailer. Our driver was a French Canadian named Leo who on two occasions got laughing so hard at Reggie Springsteads's (the team comic) stories that he drove into a snow bank. I don't think we came closer than a fourth individually in any event but we all competed in all four events and managed under the scoring system to come up with a good team showing."

Arthur Brown, Director of Athletics, served as the team's coach in 1936 while the team competed in six meets. In 1937 the College hired Dick Hubbard '36 as the first paid ski coach for Middlebury College. As was the trend at other ski schools, Middlebury looked to Europe for a coach in the late 30's and hired Arthur Schlatter. Under Schlatter's direction, the 1939 ski team, with Mel Carter as captain, won its own Middlebury Carnival over six opponents for the first time, making skiing a major sport at Middlebury. Schlatter and Hubbard worked together to pick the first women's team in 1939, which competed in the Middlebury Carnival with 8 other teams.

The Middlebury ski team had finally arrived as a skiing power. The 1940 team under captain Elbert 'Mole' Cole won every first place at a competition in Lake Placid with a tremendous performance from the diminutive Eddy Gignac who was skimeister. Gignac would later lose his life in World War II.

Skiing virtually came to a halt at Middlebury during World War II, but the hopes for the Middlebury Ski Bowl and skiing lived on in the hearts and minds of two important men. Middlebury College President Sam Stratton, wanting to be competitive against his alma mater Dartmouth, hired a well known 10th Mountain Division veteran, Joe Jones, to manage the Snow Bowl and coach the ski team. Jones recruited many of his friends from the war to return to Middlebury and form a ski team. The Trustees, influenced by Dr. Stewart Ross, gave the okay to build a 50 meter ski jump and new trails at the Snow Bowl. Robert "Bobo" Sheehan '44, whose first years at

Middlebury were interrupted by World War II where he was a fighter pilot in the Pacific, returned to Middlebury to finish college and begin coaching skiing. In 1946 Jones coached the men's team and Sheehan the women's. With Bobo's four event experience he moved the next year to coach the men's teams and quickly, with the strength of Jones' recruits, produced Middlebury's first national championship team. This legendary group of World War II 10th Mountain Division veterans would travel the three day train trip out West in both 1948 and 1949 to capture the North American Championships - first at Sun Valley and then at Aspen.

The Captain of the 1948 championship team was Tink Bailey, who finished in the top 12 in all four events at the Championships. Tink's greatest accomplishment may be something that all Middlebury athletes dream of, he was on the Varsity Ski Team for five years.

But perhaps it was the Women's Ski Team in the late 40's that put Middlebury on the map with a movie about Middlebury skiing and a lot of help by the sports writers of the New York Times. The most famous women skier those years was Becky Fraser. Fraser, captain of the 1944 and 1945 ski teams, won the Middlebury Carnival several times. progressing on to international competitions. Becky recalls that during her Midd years it was more difficult to get special permission to travel to races on Sunday than it was to win ski races. Becky spent several sessions with Dean Ross pleading to give her Sunday "Chapel Cuts" and excuses from classes! Becky would achieve Middlebury history by becoming the first Middlebury skier to compete for the U.S. in the Winter Olympics in 1948. Middlebury friends gave her a send-off in New York as her ski team boarded the S.S. America for the seven day sea journey to Europe. Becky's 17th place finish in the combined at St. Moritz would be courageously matched later by her husband's first place finish in the World Handicapped championships in 1973 at the age of 51. Tom, a Middlebury graduate, was captain of the 1945 and 1946 ski teams.

Middlebury's Championship Ski Team in 1948 of Tink Bailey, Phil Deane, Don Henderson, Paul Kailey, Tom Jacobs, Fred Neuberger and Jack Valentine would firmly establish the College as a national skiing power, and attract some of the best young skiers in the East as recruits. Many Middlebury skiers went on to ski for the United States internationally. The first male Midd skiers to compete for the United States in the Olympics were Tom Jacobs '51 and Verne Goodwin '53 who competed in the 1952 Winter Olympics in Oslo. A young Norwegian skier, Guttorm Berge, would win a bronze medal in the 1952 games and then transfer to go to school at Middlebury. Berge recounts a remark from Doug Burden before a downhill race. "Burden said the shortest way to the hospital was to follow my tracks downhill. He was right, less than an hour later I was there!" Doug Burden himself would continue the Middlebury skiing tradition by competing for the United States in the 1954 world championships.

Bobo Sheehan's accomplishments as a coach would be recognized in 1956 as he was selected to coach the 1956 Olympic Team. Les Streeter '55, would ski on that Olympic Team while Bob Beattie '55, would take over the coaching responsibilities back in Middlebury for Bobo. This early work experience for Beattie would land him a coaching job at the University of Colorado and eventually the U.S. ski team, gaining him National and International exposure and opening up opportunities in the TV broadcasting business.

During the 1950's, women's skiing, under coach Neuberger, enjoyed much success and was generally thought of as a model ski program. However, fall conditioning was not as an important part of the ski program then. This fact would be challenged in 1956 by Penny Pitou, who spent one year at Middlebury. Penny recalls the days in Middlebury as a freshman:

> "In those days women didn't 'sweat' so it was a little difficult to train and still look 'preppy'. I lived in the Chateau and trained in my sweat suit in the brambles behind the dorm. Lots of fun?! More than once Mrs. Kelly (then Dean of Women) asked me to 'please try to fit in and not be so much of a jock'. I didn't heed her however."

Penny's minor achievement for a Middlebury skier would be to make the Dean's list freshman year. A major first came in 1960 at Squaw Valley as Penny became the first American to win a medal in downhill.

Penny was joined at the 1960 Olympics by three other Middlebury skiers, Peter Lahdenpera '59, Gordi Eaton '65, and Renie Cox '60. Gordi Eaton and Nancy Sise '63 would go on to ski in the 1962 World Championships, coached by Beattie in his first year with the U.S. Ski Team and assisted by Fred Neuberger. Lahdenpera would also compete in the 1964 and the 1972 Olympics on the biathlon team and then return as a biathlon coach in 1976 and in 1980. Spanning 20 years of international competition, Peter Lahdenpera has been the only Middlebury skier to ski in three Olympic Games.

Not surprisingly, Lahdenpera's senior year in 1959, Middlebury returned to the dominant spot in Eastern skiing by winning the Dartmouth Carnival for the first time since 1948. The Midd men were undefeated in the East for three straight years from 1958 to 1960 and were only kept from winning the 1959 National Championships when both Herb Thomas and Lahdenpera were unable to compete in the final jumping event because of injury and sickness.

A freshman on the 1960 Ski Team, John Bower began another one of Middlebury's most distinguished careers in skiing. John moved from a first place finish in the 1961 NCAA championships in the Nordic combined to compete in the World Championships in 1962 and the Olympics in 1964 and 1968, in both the Nordic combined and the cross country relay. In 1968 John achieved what no person outside of Scandinavia had ever done before by

winning the famed Nordic combined trophy at Holmenkollen. John would return to Middlebury in 1969 to coach the ski team where he remained until 1975, then returning to serve the United States as a Nordic Coach in the 1976 and 1980 Winter Olympics.

Many great skiiers would win individual first places at Winter carnivals during the '60s, including Gordi Eaton and ski team captains John Clough '64, Pete Swallow '65, Roger Buchika '66, and John Morton and Bill McCollum of the Class of '68. John Morton recalls a comment that Bobo emphasized at the first ski team Fall meeting. "Alpine skiers are a dime a dozen around here. If you want to make this Middlebury team you'd better learn to jump and ski cross country!" John Morton would heed Bobo's advice and become a strong member of the cross country team as an undergraduate. Like many Middlebury alums before him, he would continue to ski in International events, competing in the 1972 and the 1976 Olympics. Again, as many Middlebury skiers before him, John would go on to coach the United States Olympic team in 1980 in biathalon. In fact, ten Middlebury graduates have gone on to coach U. S. Olympic teams.

In 1970 Steve Lathrop would finish the Fall term of his freshman year to go on and ski in the World Championships in Italy. After the first run Steve was in third place and in medal position but unfortunately caught a pole between his legs in his final run leading to his disqualification. John Morton and Dennis Donahue would compete in the World Championships in biathlon and Captain Paul "Rat" Reed would win the Middlebury Carnival slalom with his eye taped open after a late night spink game in back of Sig Ep. Paul's sister Pam, under the guidance of Bonnie Bower and a newly rejuvenated women's ski team, would win the FIS University games giant slalom in Lake Placid. During the early '70s women skiing would progress from a two event Winter Carnival to an all Eastern organization leading to a National Championship which Middlebury women would first win in 1976.

The ski team under John Bower would perform well and win some competitions in the East, however the competition at a National level had become very competitive with imported foreign athletes dominating the Nordic events. Ski team Captain Hugh Barber would finish seventh in the National Championships in 1971 and find himself the first American. There is little doubt that the reduced opportunities for American ski jumpers would have a contributing factor to the eventual demise of ski jumping as a college event by 1981.

In 1972 more skiers represented Middlebury College in the Winter Olympics than any games before. Joe McNulty '72 would ski for the cross country team while 4 members of previous Middlebury teams would compete on the biathlon team. These skiers include Dennis Donahue, Terry Morse, John Morton, and Peter Lahdenpera. Hank Tauber, a 1964 graduate, would be the Head Alpine Coach for the Olympic team.

By the early '70s the Snow Bowl had grown to become the showpiece of College-owned ski areas. Under the warm and

strong direction of Ralph Myhre, a chairlift and new trails were added to the ski area and, with a great sense of pride, Middlebury hosted the 1973 NCAA National Championships. Ralph had been the manager of the Snow Bowl since the early 50's and had developed the area from a hill with three small rope tows to a mountain with a chairlift, three poma lifts, and thirteen trails. Vermont enjoyed good snow years in the early '70s and there were only a few ski areas with artificial snowmaking systems. However, it wouldn't be long before poor snow years and artificial snow at other nearby areas would attract away the college skiing crowd.

In 1976 Middlebury would send three skiers and two coaches to the '76 Olympics in Innsbruck. Dennis Donahue and John Morton would again compete in biathlon while a young Leslie Smith would compete in the downhill and giant slalom. John Bower and Finn Gunderson would both be involved with coaching.

Also in 1976, Terry Aldrich, having successfully challenged the Middlebury Ski Team as a coach at the University of New Hampshire, would join the Middlebury coaching staff to replace John Bower. Terry would hire two former Olympians, Gordi and Karen Budge Eaton, to coach the Alpine team and to assist long-time Alpine Coach Charlie Brush. Terry would enjoy immediate success with the women's team winning the National Championships that year. The year 1976 would signal the beginning of a five-year domination of women's skiing by the Middlebury team. The women would win the National Championship four times and finish second once in the next six years while remaining undefeated in the Eastern Championships. On the Men's side, the names of Goodwin and Jacobs would again be found on the very top of the result sheets. Son's of Middlebury's first male Olympians, John Jacobs '78 and Jim Goodwin '79 would lead the Middlebury men's teams in good form, similar to the way their fathers led the team in the early '50s. In fact, the younger Jacobs, would win the Middlebury Carnival on an injured ankle, beating out his archrival and good friend, four-time All American Scott Light of the University of Vermont.

The fields in the National Championships in the early '80s would be dominated by foreign athletes in both men's and women's Alpine and Nordic events, however, individual Middlebury skiers would continue to achieve outstanding results. Leslie Smith, who began her skiing at the Snow Bowl as a junior racer, would return from the '76 Olympics to captain the Middlebury Ski Team in the early '80s and achieve a result that no other Middlebury athlete, male or female, had achieved in Middlebury sports history. Leslie would win the coveted NCAA All-American award for four consecutive years in her sport. Leslie Baker '84, would almost duplicate this amazing feat the following year, losing her chances in the final run of the women's slalom at the National Championship in 1984 with a hooked tip.

Numerous skiers would win All-American awards in the early '80s for both the men's and women's teams in Alpine and Nordic. Craig Ward would represent the United States in the 1980 Olympics at Lake Placid, and cross country skier Terry White '78

would compete in both the 1980 and 1984 Summer Olympics in kayaking. Terry would receive a letter from the Middlebury Physical Education Department that he would later frame and hang on the Olympic Training Center wall that reminds him that he had failed to pass his P.E. requirements.

Just this past winter, Mike Graham would be the first American finisher in the NCAA cross country championship, but perhaps the greatest success story comes from Sue Long '82. Sue would ski as an Alpine skier on a National Championship team her freshman year, convert to cross country skiing and ski at an All-American level by her senior year, and then go on to ski for the United States Olympic team in 1984. Long's achievements would epitomize Middlebury's long-standing commitment to development. This is a contrast to last year's national championship ski team, the University of Utah, who could only find room for 2 Americans on the 16 person squad. This has prompted our coaching staff to say; "Middlebury builds skiers, we don't buy them".

In the late Winter of 1984 President Robison and the Trustees were faced with the difficult decision of what to do with the Snow Bowl. Without snowmaking, the poor skiing conditions had driven the student skiers away in droves. The ski team had only been able to hold one full winter carnival in the last five years, and student-athletes were spending two hours a day, and 8000 miles a winter, on the road traveling to train. Yet knowing the tradition of Middlebury skiing there was only one possible decision that could be made. The Trustees approved an $800,000 improvement project that will make the Snow Bowl the best college skiing facility in the country. With guaranteed snow, Middlebury skiers in every generation to follow will have the opportunity to develop their full potential as athletes.

To date, $150,000 has been pledged by over 100 people toward the $800,000 goal of the Snow Bowl Improvement Project. Many of those people are in this room, and we want to take this opportunity to thank you for your generous support. We will continue to work to raise the full amount for the Sheehan Chairlift and the snowmaking system, and we want to make sure that everyone that wants to have an opportunity to contribute to the project gets that chance.

The present ski team would like to formally thank President Robison and the Trustees for the wonderful opportunity that they have offered us. Next, we want to thank all of you here for creating the tradition that drives us forward to reach for our potential.